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Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of eighteen members of the Human Rights Council

Note verbale dated 29 June 2012 from the Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations presents its compliments to the President of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly and, with reference to the decision of the Government of Sweden to present its candidature to the Human Rights Council for the term 2013-2015 at the elections to be held in 2012, and in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251, has the honour to submit Sweden's voluntary pledges with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights (see annex).

The Permanent Mission of Sweden would be grateful if the present note and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

* A/67/50.

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Annex to the note verbale dated 29 June 2012 from the Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Candidature of Sweden to the Human Rights Council for the period 2013-2015

Voluntary pledges and commitments

Sweden is a first-time candidate to the Human Rights Council, for the period 2013-2015, and has the support of the Nordic countries.

Sweden is deeply committed to the promotion and protection of human rights. Sweden is a long-standing supporter of the United Nations work on human rights — in both political and economic terms — as a Member State, as a State party to core human rights conventions and as a development partner, devoting 1 per cent of its gross national income to international development cooperation. The promotion of democracy and human rights is a key priority in Sweden's bilateral and multilateral development cooperation.

1. Sweden's general objectives

If elected, Sweden would pursue the following general objectives:

- Consolidate the Human Rights Council as the United Nations primary human rights body.
- Promote the realization of all human rights — civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights — on the basis of international human rights law.
- Enable the Council to fulfil its mandate to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and to address situations of human rights violations.
- Support the Council in mainstreaming human rights throughout the United Nations system.
- Promote the interdependence of development, peace and security, and human rights.
- Ensure that the Council's mechanisms and instruments are designed, implemented and monitored to enhance the enjoyment of human rights for all.
- Support and strengthen the effective functioning of the universal periodic review process.
- Support opportunities for Member States, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to avail themselves of the Council's mechanisms and instruments.
- Further the Council's interaction with treaty bodies and with regional human rights systems and mechanisms.

2. Sweden's focus

Sweden seeks membership in the Human Rights Council to drive action in a broad range of Council activities, and to work cross-regionally and in a spirit of genuine dialogue and cooperation. Some of the activities where Sweden would drive action would be:

(a) Full and equal enjoyment of human rights

Sweden pledges to:

- Firmly promote the indivisibility, interdependence and universality of human rights.
- Stand firm for the principle that all persons are entitled to the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, age, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

(b) Democracy and the rule of law

Sweden pledges to:

- Promote the interlinkages and interdependence between a functioning democracy, strong and accountable institutions, effective rule of law and full respect for all human rights, as a prerequisite for sustainable development.
- Work to improve the capacity of the international community to provide effective support to States seeking to promote and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, including by supporting the efforts of the relevant United Nations structures to integrate and mainstream democracy, the rule of law and human rights into their strategic planning.

(c) Mainstreaming human rights

Sweden pledges to take an active part in the Council's efforts to:

- Accelerate the process of mainstreaming human rights and integrating a human rights-based approach in all areas and at all levels of United Nations action.
- Strengthen the capacity of the United Nations to mainstream human rights in its work in the field.
- Support and develop key, strategic mainstreaming interventions and mechanisms.

(d) Human rights and new information technologies

Sweden pledges to:

- Continue to emphasize that the enjoyment of all human rights extends to the use of new information technologies, such as the Internet.
- Maintain a strong focus on the application of freedom of expression online.
- Support the role of the Council in safeguarding human rights in new information technologies, such as the Internet.

- Continue to advocate that universal access to the Internet should be an overarching objective and that increased access to the infrastructure and contents of the Internet is a precondition for the full enjoyment of human rights, including freedom of expression online.

(e) Women's enjoyment of human rights and gender equality

Sweden pledges to:

- Advocate for universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, and for the withdrawal of reservations which are incompatible with the aim and purpose of the Convention.
- Propose and support initiatives aimed at mainstreaming gender equality in all United Nations human rights work.
- Support initiatives to increase women's political participation, enhance women's economic empowerment and ensure women's right to health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Work for increased attention to the situation of the girl child and girl child empowerment.
- Contribute to maintaining focus on eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women.

(f) The rights of the child

Sweden pledges to:

- Advocate for the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.
- Muster global commitment to effectively eliminate all forms of violence against children.
- Address the issue of harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation and early and forced marriage, as well as gender stereotyping.
- Contribute to securing the rights of the child and the application of a rule of law perspective to the issue of children in the administration of justice.
- Address the issue of the impact of armed conflict on children, efforts to end recruitment of children and the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers.

(g) The rights of persons with disabilities

Sweden pledges to:

- Advocate for universal ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol.
- Seek to establish a reporting line to the Human Rights Council for the Special Rapporteur on Disability, and continue to support the Special Rapporteur's mandate.

- Work to ensure effective, accessible and inclusive participation at the United Nations; place stronger focus on participation in political and public life, work and employment, including gender equality dimensions.
- Support the work of the recently established United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

(h) Death penalty, torture and summary executions

Sweden pledges to:

- Support the Council's efforts to promote the abolition of the death penalty.
- Maintain the Council's role as main sponsor of resolutions on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and make additional efforts to keep the issue high on the United Nations human rights agenda.
- Renew and support the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions.
- Support the Council's efforts to combat torture and inhuman and degrading treatment, including promoting the work of the Special Rapporteur.

(i) Business and human rights

Sweden pledges to:

- Encourage and contribute to the dissemination and implementation of the United Nations Framework and Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- Work for a continued presence of the issue of business and human rights on the Council's agenda.

3. Contributing to the United Nations system

Sweden contributes 1 per cent of its gross national income to international development assistance. Sweden thereby exceeds the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent, and is one of the largest statutory and voluntary contributors to the United Nations budget. Per capita, Sweden is the one of the largest donors in overall contributions to the United Nations system. We view this as part of our commitment to human rights, since we seek to mainstream human rights in all development work, whether multilateral or bilateral. Sweden is also one of the four largest contributors of funds to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Sweden will continue to be a strong partner and a main contributor to OHCHR, and will seek to increase its contributions as needed. We put a strong emphasis on delivering results in the field, and will continue to call for an even more effective and result-oriented human rights protection system worldwide.

Sweden was, for instance, a main financial supporter of the recently opened field office of OHCHR in Tunis.

4. Commitment to United Nations instruments

Sweden is a strong defender of the international human rights system. Sweden advocates for universal ratification of the core United Nations human rights conventions and is a State party to the following instruments:

- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and its Optional Protocol
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its two Optional Protocols
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol
- Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocols on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and on the involvement of children in armed conflict
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Sweden seeks to promote the effective implementation of the conventions universally, by actively working on the realization of rights at the national level, submitting State Party reports on time and engaging in dialogue with treaty bodies. In parallel, Sweden also actively promotes the strengthening of the treaty body system, including through proper resourcing and targeted capacity-building by States Parties and other stakeholders.

Sweden is a main sponsor of three General Assembly resolutions in support of four of the core human rights conventions and their optional protocols: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural kights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Sweden is currently the President of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

5. Cooperating with the special procedures of the Council

Sweden has extended a standing invitation to all United Nations special rapporteurs and independent experts and has regularly received visits from several rapporteurs. Sweden highly values the opportunities for Member States and other stakeholders to contribute to and benefit from the work and findings of the special procedures and mandate holders.

6. Regional engagement

Sweden engages actively in human rights work regionally through membership of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the European Union. As a party to the 1950 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Sweden has an obligation to abide by judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. The work carried out within the Council of Europe has created a common legal platform throughout Europe, ensuring respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

As a member of the European Union, Sweden is bound by the human rights obligations arising from European Union law, such as the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights.

7. Human rights in Sweden

(a) Mainstreaming of human rights

Sweden is committed to the mainstreaming of human rights in practice, ensuring human rights are observed and integrated into all aspects of Swedish society. The Swedish Constitution and legal system are based on, and designed to protect and guarantee, the enjoyment of human rights in Sweden.

(b) National Action Plan for Human Rights

The Government is currently preparing its third National Action Plan for Human Rights. As a part of this process, the Government is committed to following up the universal periodic review as well as the conclusions and recommendations of treaty bodies. Civil society, the private sector, public authorities and local administrations are key partners in this process. The Government strives in particular to provide support to civil society organizations, maintaining a constant dialogue with them on human rights issues and challenges. A proposal to establish a national human rights institution is currently being considered.

(c) Gender equality

Ensuring that women fully enjoy all human rights is an important political priority in Sweden. Sweden has come a long way towards gender equality. Women have a high level of participation in political and economic life. Nevertheless, challenges remain in all parts of Swedish society and considerable resources are therefore allocated to gender equality policies. The Government is prioritizing efforts to prevent and combat violence against women and has implemented several comprehensive action plans with new working methods in this area.

(d) Anti-discrimination efforts

Combating all forms of discrimination is one of the key human rights objectives of the Swedish Government. In February 2012, the Government adopted a coordinated and long-term strategy for Roma inclusion for the period 2012-2032. The strategy reinforces the minority policy promoting the rights of all five national minorities: Jews, Roma, Sami, Swedish Finns and Tornedalers. Significant efforts have also been made to increase opportunities for national minorities to use their own language in contacts with national and local authorities.

(e) The rights of persons with disabilities

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires States to guarantee by law that persons with disabilities, without exception, have the same rights as all people. When ratifying the Convention, the assessment was made that Sweden satisfies the Convention's demands. Sweden is currently awaiting the consideration by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of Sweden's initial report to the Committee.

(f) The rights of the child

The Government is making systematic efforts to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Swedish law and other administrative procedures in all areas that concern children. In 2010, the Riksdag (Parliament) adopted a strategy for public sector actors to strengthen the rights of the child in Sweden. The focus now is on implementing the strategy. Other areas in focus are parenting support, the fight against violence, including sexual abuse and exploitation, and children in vulnerable situations.

(g) Countering of hate crimes

The Swedish Government is deeply concerned about hate crimes. The Government is carefully following the efforts of the authorities involved in countering these crimes, in order to further develop crime-prevention mechanisms. Special attention is being paid to the problem of ethnic hatred expressed on the Internet.

(h) Indigenous people

As recognized in the Constitution, the Sami people are the indigenous people of Sweden. Sweden agrees with the Special Rapporteur that despite the relatively high level of attention given to indigenous issues in the Nordic countries, more remains to be done to ensure that the Sami people can enjoy a full range of rights and develop their common goals across national boundaries.

The Swedish Government is committed to supporting and promoting Sami self-determination on issues directly affecting the Sami people. The Sami Parliament is gradually being given increased responsibilities. Together with Norway and Finland, and with the participation of the three Nordic Sami Councils, Sweden is engaged in negotiating a Nordic Sami convention, which would confirm and strengthen the rights of the Sami people.